THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • MONDAY • DECEMBER 30, 2024 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 18 • LATE CITY EDITION

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CONSTITUTION HAS STOOD EVERY TEST OF TIME, SAYS PRIME MINISTER MODI

The Constitution has stood every test of time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his monthly radio address Mann ki Baat on Sunday

CALLS THE DOCUMENT 'OUR GUIDING LIGHT'

"It is a matter of immense pride for all of us. The Constitution which its makers gave to us has stood every test of time. It is our guiding light," the prime minister said, adding that he reached "this position in life" because of the document. He asked the people to visit www.constitution75.com and learn about India's constitutional heritage and legacy

URGES PEOPLE TO BANISH HATE FROM SOCIETY

- He described the upcoming 'Maha Kumbh' as the 'mahakumbh of unity' and asked the people to resolve to banish hate from the society
- Modi also spoke about the growing global resonance of Ayurveda. He said in Paraguay, a large number of local people are reaching out to the Indian embassy where Ayurveda consultation is offered | P9

80%

FALL IN NUMBER OF MALARIA CASES IN INDIA BETWEEN 2015 AND 2023: MODI

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

179 killed as South Korean plane crash-lands, erupts into fireball

Two crew members of Bangkok-Muan flight survive; landing gear glitch, bird hit suspected

Rescue team members carry the body of a passenger at the crash site at Muan International Airport, South Korea on Sunday | AP/PTI

AGENCIES

IN one of the worst aviation disasters in recent times, all but two of 181 people on board a passenger flight were killed after it skidded off the runway while landing at South Korean's Muan international airport on Sunday and burst into flames. Horrific visuals of the accident showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed after its landing gear failed to deploy, overshooting the runway, ramming a concrete wall, and exploding.

The Korean transport ministry said the Jeju Air plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and landed at Muan, 290 km south of Seoul, around 9 am.

South Korean officials said the airport control tower had issued a bird strike warning to the plane shortly before it intended to land. The pilot reportedly sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane touched down without using its wheels or any other landing gear.

The flight had 175 passengers and six crew members on board. According to officials, 85 women, 84 men, and 10 others whose gender could not be immediately identified, died. Emergency workers managed rescue two crew members. Officials described their condition as 'not life-threatening'.

Lee Jeong-hyeon, chief of the Muan fire station, said the plane was completely destroyed, with only the tail assembly remaining recognisable among the wreckage. The two persons who survived the crash were rescued from the tail section. Lee said investigators were looking at various possibilities for the crash, including whether the plane was struck by birds.

South Korean authorities deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. Over 1,500 firefighters, police officers, soldiers, and other officials were also rushed to the site to manage the situation.

Footage of the crash aired by local television channels showed thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was still engulfed in flames.

The passengers were predominantly South Korean. Thailand's foreign ministry said two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Boeing 737-800 with 181 people on board approached to land at South Korea's Muan International Airport around 9 am local time

Pilots aborted the first landing attempt due to bird strike, which reportedly damaged the jet's landing gear

Soon, the pilots issued a "mayday" call and tried to land the plane again, this time without the landing gear deployed

Upon touchdown, the plane skidded down the runway and hit a concrete barrier before bursting into flames

A bird strike is a collision between a bird and an aircraft in flight

Narrow escape for passengers as Air Canada jet catches fire

AGENCIES

ANOTHER aviation tragedy was averted on Saturday night after an Air Canada flight suffered a suspected landing gear failure and a part of it caught fire as it skidded down the runway of Canada's Halifax airport.

All 73 passengers and crew members are safe, Air Canada spokesperson Peter Fitzpatrick said. He added that there was a suspected landing gear issue as the plane arrived to land.

A spokesperson for the Nova Scotia Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which responded to the incident alongside paramedics, said some passengers suffered minor injuries. The people on board were evacuated, and then taken to a hangar to be checked out by paramedics, AP reported.

A passenger told a local television channel she heard a loud noise when the plane landed. "We heard a pretty loud—what almost sounded like a crash—sound as the wing of the plane started to skid along the (runway), along with what I presume was the engine," she said. She said the plane then skidded down the runway for a "decent" distance as the pilots worked to stop the plane. "The plane shook quite a bit and we started seeing fire on the left side of the plane and smoke started coming in the windows," she said.

The Air Canada Express flight operated by Pal Airlines was arriving from St John's, Newfoundland. Flight operations at the Halifax airport were temporarily suspended.

NEW INTEL

TAX DEPT TO TAP DIGI YATRA DATA TO GO AFTER EVADERS

DIPAK MONDAL @New Delhi

IF you are a frequent user of Digi Yatra app but don't file income tax returns, don't be surprised if you get a notice from the tax department.

According to sources, the tax department has accessed the entire passenger data captured on the Digi Yatra app, and the same is being reconciled with tax filings to check for discrepancies in the declared income. The tax department would start issuing notices in 2025 based on the Digi Yatra data, said sources.

Digi Yatra app is a civil aviation ministry-led initiative to make air traveller's journey seamless and paperless. It uses facial recognition technology, and collects passengers ID, biometrics, and details of air tickets to give easy access at airports. It is, however, not mandatory for fliers to download or use the app.

According to sources, the tax department will first go after those who don't file tax returns, and then target those who under-report their income to avoid paying taxes. The department is perusing the data of both international and domestic air travellers. Frequent or high-value travel, particularly international trips, could flag individuals whose reported earnings do not justify such expenditures, prompting further scrutiny.

"Data provided by Digi Yatra is inherently clean, reliable, and verifiable, making it a robust source for government use in tax administration. Once integrated and reconciled with income tax filings, it can effectively identify non-filers, placing them at the forefront of scrutiny. Subsequently, taxpayers engaging in income suppression or under-reporting could also be systematically targeted," said a source.

GLOBETROTTERS UNDER THE LENS

According to sources, the financial records of frequent international fliers could be subjected to scrutiny to check for any income suppression in their I-T returns

According to tax experts, Digi Yatra data holds immense potential as an alternative to the government's earlier attempts to gather travel data through loyalty programmes of air travel companies—a move constrained by privacy concerns.

"By leveraging such data, authorities can achieve greater transparency and precision in tracking high-risk taxpayers, provided that appropriate safeguards for data privacy and proportionality are in place," says Rajat Mohan, senior partner, AMRG & Associates.

Questions sent to the tax department and Digi Yatra on the issue remained unanswered till the time of filing of this report.

It must be recalled that air travellers have raised privacy concerns over the collection data on the app. However, the authorities have maintained that data is not stored in any central repository, and that it is stored locally in the phone of the passenger.

RACE TO THE FINISH

A jockey guides a pair of buffaloes during Kambala (buffalo race) at Goldfinch City in Mangaluru on Sunday | EXPRESS

RTCs postpone strike as CM agrees to release ₹2k cr

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

THE Joint Action Committee (JAC) of state road transport corporation employees' unions, which had called for an indefinite strike from December 31, has decided to postpone the agitation.

This comes after Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, who met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday evening, stated that he has sought Rs 2,000 crore and the CM has agreed to release the fund.

The AITUC-affiliated KSRTC Staff and Workers' Federation, with the support of five other transport unions, had called for the indefinite strike with various demands. One of the main demands was to settle the salary dues that have been pending for the past three years.

Federation president HV Ananta Subba Rao said they decided to postpone their strike after a written assurance from the minister that a meeting will be convened with the CM after the Sankranti festival to address their various demands.

Reddy, after the meeting the CM, told the media, "Transport unions have demanded that the government fulfil their 13 demands. I met the CM and apprised him about the demands. I also placed a request to release Rs 2,000 crore."

Reddy blamed the previous BJP government for pushing the four bus corporations into financial distress.

"The BJP government left the bus corporations with a debt of Rs 5,900 crore and there were no recruitments and no new buses were added. After we came to power, however, we recruited 10,000 people and launched 4,300 buses," he said.

K'taka saw 217 maternal deaths in four months

RISHITA KHANNA @Bengaluru

KARNATAKA recorded 348 maternal deaths till November this year, with 217 cases reported in just four months, from August to November. Of these, 179 were in government hospitals and 38 in private facilities.

The data shows that between August and November, over 50 maternal deaths were reported each month in the state. While Ringer's Lactate, an IV fluid, came under scrutiny following maternal deaths in Ballari, experts stressed that other factors, such as postpartum haemorrhage (excessive bleeding following delivery), lack of supportive antibiotics, trained medical professionals and adequate care for postpartum infections, also need urgent attention.

Dr Ramesh GH, Head of Emergency and Critical Care at BMCRI, said the role of Ringer's Lactate should not be viewed in isolation, but should be considered in a broader context. A detailed investigation into the overall treatment process and underlying medical conditions is necessary to pinpoint the real causes of the fatalities.

The suggestion that IV fluids like Ringer's Lactate can be directly blamed for maternal deaths fails to consider the complexities of medical cases, experts said and explained that a death would typically be within hours due to anaphylaxis (allergic reaction) if Ringer's Lactate were substandard or improperly administered. P7

EXPRESS READ

India not very lucky on security front: Rajnath

Mhow (MP): Addressing Army personnel at Madhya Pradesh's Mhow cantonment, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said that India is a 'not very lucky' nation on the security front and urged soldiers to keep a sharp eye on internal and external foes

ISRO to demonstrate docking of sats in space

New Delhi: ISRO is set to launch two satellites on Monday night from the Sriharikota spaceport to demonstrate docking and undocking of spacecraft in orbit, which will make India the fourth country in the world to achieve the feat.

Lyon, Boland stand firm

After reducing Australia to 91/6 in the second innings, India had a real chance to bowl the hosts for cheap. However, Marnus Labuschagne and Pat Cummins survived some scares to add to their first innings lead of 105. To add to India's woes, Nathan Lyon and Scott Boland added 55 runs for the last wicket, taking Australia to 228/9 and more importantly, putting them ahead by 333

OPEN CONTEST SET FOR THRILLING CLIMAX

Day Four of the ongoing Boxing Day Test in Melbourne was a gripping contest. Indian bowlers ripped through the Australia top-order before being frustrated by the tailenders. All three results are possible on Day 5. A look...

Record attendance

It began with a little over 87,000 fans on Day 1, but as the Test enters Day 5, it has already become the most-attended Boxing Day Test at the historic venue (2,99,329), surpassing 2017-18 Ashes (2,71,855)

Milestone man Bumrah

It's been a happy series for Jasprit Bumrah, 29 wickets in eight innings at 13.24—12 more than Cummins. On Sunday, Bumrah became the first-ever bowler to take 200 wickets at a Test average of less than 20 | P13

GRAND FINISH

Chess high on year-end as Humpy captures second world rapid title in USA

AJAY TOMAR @Hyderabad

THERE is a different joy of being a mother. India's Koneru Humpy had won the World Rapid Chess Championship on Saturday but when she spoke about the win a day later, she could not help but speak about her seven-year-old daughter. Humpy's daughter was a thousand miles away in Vijayawada with her parents.

"My daughter won a gold medal in abacus yesterday (Saturday), so she was having her own moment," Humpy told this daily from New York on Sunday. For Humpy, her daughter's victory seems to be as big as her second world rapid medal, a record she shares with China's Ju Wenjun. "I spoke to my daughter just after the win." The 37-year-old from Vijayawada last won the title in 2019.

Sleep deprived, missing her daughter while playing against some of the stalwarts of the game, yet she remained unflustered and finished the event with 8.5 out of 11 points. The year 2024 was not as she would have liked it to be. There was a time when she was mulling quitting the sport. The win was cathartic.

"It was a rough year for me. I started with Candidates (tied for second) but then in Norway Chess and the Tata Steel Chess, my performance was very bad.

Koneru Humpy

I was feeling very low at that time. I even thought of quitting professional chess. But I was not ready to accept the defeat and finish my career on a bad note," she said, adding that she spent the whole of November training for the World Rapid and Blitz event. Chess could not have asked for a better end to the year. Men's world champion in D Gukesh, Candidates, World Cup finalist, Chess Olympiad gold for men and women and now a world rapid woman champion.

"There were a lot of spectators cheering considering it was being organised in the Financial District of New York (at Wall Street). I was ranked 10th at the start and lost the first round. I finished the day with only 2.5 points in four games. I did not imagine then that I could win. I was only looking to fight back after the first game's loss. On Day 2, I won all the four games that helped me to climb to the joint lead. But after Day 3 ended in draws, I was expecting tie-breaks. I did not know that I had won and was preparing for tie-breaks. It was only when the arbiter told me I realised. I was surprised."

On winning the event for the second time, Humpy said, "With time, the younger generation is competing fiercely and it is not easy to repeat the feat. You are more poised and energetic to win something the first time. Winning for the second time is even tougher as many players are half my age."